

Prayer

teach us to pray

Terry R. Lynch

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Agnes Retno Utami whose love, patience and support has been overflowing my cup



“I am here for you”

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PROTESTATION

The following is a Protestation that was composed by Saint Teresa de Avila to be placed at the beginning of the first printed edition of the “Way of Perfection,” which was issued at Evora soon after her death. I wish to adopt this for my own book, in the habit of prayer and service to God.



“ In all that I may say in this treatise, I submit myself to what is held by our Mother, the holy Roman Church, and if there be in it anything contrary to this, it will be unintentional.

For the love of God, therefore, I beseech the theologians, who are to see the work, very carefully to examine it, and to correct any such faults, with many others that may be found in it of whatever kind.

If there be any good in it, may it be for the glory and honour of God, and for the service of His most holy Mother, our Patroness and our Queen, whose Habit I wear, though utterly unworthy of it. ”



1 REPENT, BELIEVE AND ATTAIN THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

“Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2), and so before Him was John the Baptist who washed away our sins in the waters of baptism and prepared us to commune specially with the Christ face-to-face in a similar way that Moses communed in the presence of God however could not see nor was allowed to see God’s face (Exodus 33:23). It is written and as such John the Baptist is the first to encounter the Christ and shows us that to seek the face of God requires a transformation of oneself from our original sin which is removed at baptism, to adorning the habit of prayer and devotion which then and only then may our journey begin.

As the Christ was born to the House of David, then lived and grew in knowledge, the disciples and the people of the Holy Land got to see the face of Jesus and follow him in real time so we too with the manifestation of the church and the end times are transformed from our original sin through baptism to being clothed in purity of spirit to find the face of Christ through our perfection of prayer and holy life. It is when the journey of transformation ends, with purging of all sin by a fire of love, that we shall meet him in heaven. It is in ordinary time that we truly walk with the Christ in a sociable sense, and through his mercy attained with fasting and prayer we are through the various times of the churches calendar (that is lent and so forth)

that we prepare for and transform our earthly ways to commune with God. We are in reality; if one could only see with eyes of faith and with suffering, penance and prayer on the way of the cross and when our spirit is commended to God almighty so too shall we be perfected in the imitation of His Christ and see God face-to-face when our time is fulfilled. We see a reflection of the majesty of God as we are created in his image and likeness, in those with child-like faith who have grown in their prayer and spiritual life to become more mature and fully adorned, gleaming brightly in the full armour of God. As we read in Genesis between Jacob and the angel, mankind grapples with the true majesty of God blessed by our afflictions and encounter with the Creator through prayer. As Saint Augustine encountered the child playing on the seashore with a shell sharing with him that he was trying to take up the whole ocean into this hollow vessel, St. Augustine explains to the child that he could not take up the ocean in this limited vessel as much as our mentality could not soak up the entire majesty of God. Mankind can never truly understand God and the love he has for his children, this will forever remain a mystery and is contained within the magisterium of his holy church. The church is guided by the Holy Spirit which in the words of Pope Benedict XVI at the Pentecost of 2006 “is the spirit of Jesus Christ, the Spirit who unites the Father with the Son in Love.”

However in today's world people see darkness with conflicting religions and contradictions within the bible itself, people are longing for the natural order that is being challenged by certain ideas within humanity and are struggling to find and keep prayer which has a way of ordering things. As the motto of Blessed Cardinal Newman says Heart speaks unto heart and people find comfort in groups that feel the same longing for truth. Saint Edith Stein says that her “longing for truth was a single prayer” and this is true of our hearts where God speaks in silence but we have to know how to interpret this silence. The second stanza of the poem “The Dark Night of the Soul” by St John of the Cross is prominent of a soulful prayer in the darkness clinging to the truth but stained with doubt; we are reminded that even those who have found their vocation in life and have a strong prayer life can see darkness. Saint John of the Cross reveals a sense that he has actually found and securely walks with and in the Christ from within the dark night and Jesus rejoiced that he

has found his lost sheep. Saint John is filled with the Holy Spirit, continued to go out strengthened to tell the good news and make disciples of the nations which he does with his eloquent poem that is constantly referenced both in the secular and religious community.

This shows that we cannot be fully faultless all the time and recognises that we are only human however, our God will see us blameless like the one whom we aim to emulate. And so were the disciples rebuked by Jesus and instructed so as to progress more in their formation. When we pray they are lifted like rising incense to heaven and “in Jesus’ filial communion with the Father, his human soul is also taken up into the act of praying. He who sees Jesus sees the Father (John 14:9). The disciple who walks with Jesus is thus caught up with him into communion with God.”(Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, p.8) and if we shall tire he shall wash our feet, and if we shall sink God shall extend out his saving hand.

As so our hearts long for the creator, our path to perfect prayer is to our treasure in heaven which is God. Therefore once we have attained perfection of the prayer life so we must maintain this life to watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation (Mark 14:38). That is, not to fall into the trap of lapsing back into old habits.

And of course as written in the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis, we must keep our gaze fixed on the Christ, the perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2) and to Him direct our daily prayers, sighs and tears, that our soul may merit after death to pass in happiness to the Lord. We must remember the words that Our Lord said on the cross to his mother regarding the beloved disciple John “woman, behold your son” (John 19:26-27) and with these words his holy mother who composed perfectly in interior and exterior prayer, was consecrated to us for our instruction as his disciples from the nations and as our Queen and that of the apostles. And this was sealed when Jesus said “Son, behold your mother” (Ibid. Jn.) The Holy Mother with the angel Gabriel up to the end of Jesus’ life ministry and when present at Pentecost, “remains even tempered, she does not get agitated, she is not overcome by events greater than herself; in silence she considers what happens keeping in her mind and heart, and pondering it calmly and serenely. This is the interior peace which we ought to have amid the sometimes tumultuous and confusing events of history, events whose meaning we often do not grasp and which disconcert us.” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily*, Jan 1, 2013, Saint

Peter's Basilica)

Let us therefore ask for Our Lady's aid in our journey of transformation in this world, casting aside the adornment of sin and adorning ourselves in the habit of prayer, devotion, obedience and humility as in a "spirituality of the transfiguration of the world and of hope in the coming of God's kingdom" (Pope John Paul II).

2 OUR LADY

The Virgin Mary always guides us to her son and as Saint Maximilian Kolbe says never be afraid of loving the Virgin too much as we can never love her more than Jesus. Mary was the tabernacle of the Lord and before the time for the prophecy came to be fulfilled Moses always had recourse to the tabernacle for the solution of doubts and questions, fleeing in prayer for strength in tumultuous times and the evil deeds of man; therefore let us have recourse to thee O Blessed Mother, Conceived without Sin. As now we can see the face-of-God through the Son of Man (Jesus), Blessed John Paul II says “do not be afraid” and to “open wide the doors to Christ” so that our hearts can be a tabernacle for him and where we shall take refuge in the secret chamber begging earnestly for divine aid and receiving our reward in heaven. Blessed John Paul II had recourse to the virgin and his motto was *Totus Tuus* (totally yours) he knew that total consecration (an example set down by Saint Louis de Montfort) was the way to Christ. Blessed John Paul II as Pope, the successor of Saint Peter the apostle who Christ called his rock, called upon to feed his sheep and keep the keys to the secrets of the kingdom of heaven is a fine example to follow in our prayerful life.

We must always seek counsel from the Lord; and the priest is the *persona Christi* (in the place of Christ) who sits in the place of Jesus at the Eucharistic feast; as Saint John Vianney writes he is “not for himself but for you” offering a lamp to our feet through spiritual direction as the director. The priest by his formation has achieved the path to imitation of Christ, and has gone through a formation as the disciples did when with Jesus under his spiritual direction. Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, in his writings reveals that it is the actual realisation of the person of Christ, that is ceasing to be private but for and of, one with the body of Christ in the priest (through whose reverent hands transubstantiation occurs) that

allows parishioners to develop a deep and personal bond with them. As it is written “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom to many” (Matthew 20:17-28). Failing to have a close relationship to those ordained with holy orders (priests) and to neglect spiritual direction can be disastrous as for this reason; Joshua and the children of Israel were deceived by the Gibeonites because they did not first seek counsel of the Lord but trusted too much in fair words and hence were deceived by false piety (as mentioned in the 38th chapter of the imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis).

The formation of the prayer life follows a long path with Judeo-Christian history as we see from the first example of praying with Hannah in the Old Testament, and the birth of the Christ fulfilment with Mary and the garden of olives where Jesus prayed so intensely he had sweat running from his brow like drops of blood. From the outset with Hannah we can see that prayer has been a prominent factor in the Old Testament right through to the passion of Our Lord and to the gift of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of fire. However, the path to understanding prayer has been a long and arduous one. For instance Hannah as the first example of a person praying was met with confusion by the temple priest Eli who thought she was drunk, he then blessed her and a miracle occurred. This shows the importance of a close relationship with those ordained and the blessing of prayer items to become sacramental. We at the start of mass make the sign of the cross and at the end of mass receive the priests blessing, we ask for God’s blessing upon the offerings we make at mass showing how prayer and blessings are inter-dependent. It shows that God has introduced prayer as a means of communing with his chosen people as the Rabbi Eli thought that Hannah was intoxicated and his child-like curiosity and humility lead him to ask what she was doing. When the priest Eli blessed Hannah, he sanctioned prayer and from the outset we are shown that prayer can bring a direct miraculous answer from God but one must be willing to act as part of his divine providence. And thus this is what is meant when people say God willing before a proposition that suggests a hard and winding path that requires much prayer and a strong spirit. But as promised in scripture, all roads will be straightened and just as the word became flesh and dwelt among us we are given an instruction manual of what prayer is. That if we do it right, our prayers will be answered and the stories of the Bible both old and new teach us how to pray and through prayer and spiritual direction what is the right means of interpretation. As we see in the development of the Church the scriptures were generally guarded by those instructed in the right spirit of interpretation. And it is during the homily that this is communicated to us to deepen our understanding and reflections. We see that the church has developed patiently and in the path of truth passed down from the church fathers and in the Spirit. We have gone from Latin

to the native tongue, to Vatican II and we can see in this the various stages that we ourselves must undertake to ensure that we fully partake in the course laid down by God in the old and crossing over to the new victorious in our imitation of the Christ and given the gift of His Spirit as to correctly interpret the scriptures. And what has driven these changes?, as Cardinal Ratzinger writes circa 1985 it is the saints who will bring reforms in the new millennia to the church. Who are these saints? They are men of God who have attained holiness and can interpret the direction of reform in the right spirit and therefore to the true betterment of the church. After all, the church belongs to Christ, therefore any changes are transitional – the dogmatic tradition must not and can never be reformed as it is not our church but that of God, and the saints are those whom the church is entrusted. And within the Catholic Church alone can we find this truth and the means to attain it through the sanctification of the Bishops who carry and dispense the grace of Christ through the sacraments and guide us through their fully formed priests in the place of Christ, for Christ and as another Christ. This is why the supremacy of Peter is prevalent in the minds of Catholics as thou art Peter, and Peter holds the keys (the teachings, and prayer instruction) to the Kingdom of heaven to guide his sheep on earth in the truth and therefore transfigured in the Christ to enter with his elect into his Kingdom.

3 BECOMING HOLY

The Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI said to the young people of Britain upon his Apostolic visit to the United Kingdom that God wishes for them, mostly is to become Holy. As written by Thomas a Kempis it is indeed necessary for us all who made in God's image and likeness fall on the way of the cross like Jesus and in a much lesser sense like Adam inherently sin so often, we who so speedily become lax and weak, to renew, cleanse, and inflamed with the spirit through frequent prayer have recourse to the Lord. As the Lord was not born of Adam but of divinity and therefore not inherently sinful, he can show us how to pray by his very essence and by his example pray without ceasing as God gives us this strength, this benediction. "There are three things", writes Saint Peter Chrysologus, "by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives." Saint Chrysologus continues, "Prayer, mercy and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other. Fasting is the soul of prayer; mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let us use fasting to make up for what we have lost by despising others. If you are to give him yourself you are never without the means of giving. To make these acceptable, mercy must be added. Fasting bears no fruit unless it is watered by mercy. Fasting dries up when mercy dries up. Mercy is to fasting as rain is to the earth. However you will not be allowed to keep what you have refused to give to others." (Sermon 43; PL 52, 320 e 322)

If you have it not and feel rather dry instead as Thomas a Kempis

writes continue in prayer, sigh and knock, and do not give up until you receive some crumb of saving grace, like Jacob said "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (Genesis 32:24-32). As written in the *Lectio Divina* "we read, under the eye of God, until the heart is touched and leaps into flame" and is a enlightening way of letting the Holy Spirit lead you into a much deeper prayer.

Saint Augustine said that we are restless until our heart rests in God and Saint Therese of Lisieux writes "prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus".

Of course we are nothing without God but let us not verge on the dangerous ground of saying that everything is the will of God and that we play no part with our loving gift of free will but rather as Saint Augustine instructs "pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you." Do not be afraid to ask much of God, as Saint Teresa of Avila writes we "pay God a compliment by asking great things of Him". Once we learn to pray, and we converse with God on a regular basis it will be like a friend and we will find that as Saint John Chrysostom teaches "it is simply impossible to lead, without the aid of prayer, a virtuous life".

However if prayer is getting frustrating, if we really want an answer from God, if all we get is silence and upset then we must be patient and do not think that our God has abandoned us as Saint Teresa of Avila reminds us "there are more tears shed over answered prayers than over unanswered prayers."

There is a common saying heard that patience is a virtue, this is evermore so with prayer and "virtues are formed by prayer. Prayer preserves temperance. Prayer suppresses anger. Prayer prevents emotions of pride and envy. Prayer draws into the soul the Holy Spirit, and raises man to Heaven." The words of Saint Ephrem of Syria reminds us and as the Pope so eloquently writes about the power of prayer and how Jesus was fully raised both man and God into the heavens by and with prayer during his earthly mission. May our prayers be lifted as incense to the heavens to prepare our bodies for holy work precipitated by great graces that we ask for, God willing to do great works on earth to the glory of God. As all we have is from God and all we will receive is from God. Amen.

And so by our participation at mass and prayers lifted like incense to heaven (Psalm 141:2, Revelation 8:4), may God grant us a pure heart through his grace as Mother Teresa reminds us that "purity is the fruit of prayer." And thus, with having obtained such purity through the imitation of Christ and allowing him to dwell in our hearts alone from when we go to the dwelling place of the Lord and offer up our hearts to him at mass in prayer. And of course it is during His passion where Jesus prayed with sweat knowing his fate but calling his disciples together in agape broke bread with them in abundant blessing. Therefore let us attend mass or make spiritual communion through our sufferings and offer them up as prayers and witness to God's great salvation.

As the disciples learned to pray with Jesus the "Our Father," I think we all ask like Saint John Chrysostom "what prayer could be more true before God the Father than that which the Son, who is Truth, uttered with His own lips?" And therefore our prayers shall be all so sweet when we are saying them with contrite heart in imitation of Jesus in Christian spirituality following the teaching of the twelve apostles as we pray 'For thine is the kingdom...' (Didache, 150AD). Just as Jesus took His cup of suffering according to the will of God, 'may thy will be done' (Matthew 6:10). Therefore when we pray we "set [our] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2) and ask that the great majesty of God envelops us on earth with benediction as well as it is in heaven (Ibid. Matthew). And when we follow His way of the cross and to the places where He lived on our pilgrimage may we do so with a willing spirit to seek true imitation of Him. So we may find that in the words of Saint Chrysostom "prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation for cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness."

4 LEARNING AND PERFECTING

So therefore as we learn to pray and everyday move closer to perfection in prayerful reflection and hope, may we like Blessed Mary MacKillop “let us all resign ourselves into His hands, and pray that in all things He may guide us to do His Holy Will ... When thoughts of this or that come I turn to Him and say: ‘Only what you will, my God. Use me as You will.’” For to pray to God for something we must be willing to act according to his instruction , for if we ask for something we do not truly want to learn why would we pay the time and devotion required to learn such lessons and master it? Therefore let each prayer be filled with contrition and envelop each and every lesson that comes from it as Saint Teresa of Avila teaches us “the most potent and acceptable prayer is the prayer that leaves the best effects. I don't mean it must immediately fill the soul with desire . . . The best effects [are] those that are followed up by actions - when the soul not only desires the honour of God, but really strives for it.”

And of course the one who really strives for the honour of God shall receive for Jesus tells us to ask and we shall be given and Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori the saint who was truly devoted to the Mother of God and the fruit of her womb, instructed others on how to achieve total consecration in the matter of prayer that “he who prays most receives most.” Blessed Charles de Foucauld said that “to pray means to think lovingly about Jesus. Prayer is the soul's attention that is concentrated on Jesus. The more you love Jesus, the better you pray.”

God is only capable of agape love and there are different stages of the emotion which we are capable of and the Christ instructs us in a new commandment to love one another as he has loved us. But how you may ask are we capable of being worthy of loving God and everyone including the bitterness of our enemies. Saint John Vianney instructs us on how a heart which is simple and contrite may be stretched by the divine will as “hearts are small, but prayer stretches them and makes them capable of loving God. Through prayer we receive a foretaste of heaven and something of paradise comes down upon us. Prayer never leaves us without sweetness. It is honey that flows into the souls and makes all things sweet. When we pray properly, sorrows disappear like snow before the sun”.

Prayer on our own or private prayer is beneficial to the individual and so enjoys brief periods of happiness with prayer through the spirit but at mass attendance and with the prayers of the faithful a large beacon alights to God and enlightens the areas deep within us that need the most attention. Saint John Vianney explains that “private prayer is like straw scattered here and there: If you set it on fire it makes a lot of little flames. But gather these straws into a bundle and light them, and you get a mighty fire, rising like a column into the sky; public prayer is like that.” Public prayer at mass joined with other offerings of the holy mass contains the Our Father which is said “of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). Leaning on each other in a familial love and that of a profound friendship as in the words of Saint Francis of Assisi says “all creatures are children of the Father and therefore brothers”. Saint Augustine also says “in the Lord’s Prayer we all say together, ‘Our Father’. So says the emperor, the beggar, the slave, the master. They are all brothers, because they have one Father”.

The God that loves us should also be our friend, during my initiation classes I remember my teacher discussing with us how we view Jesus, and she said that most young people view Jesus as a friend who we turn to when we need a shoulder to lean on. Moses had this intimate, personal relationship with God, “the Lord used to speak to Moses face-to-face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11). Saint Ignatius of Loyola talks of friendship when he teaches that “we must speak to God as a friend speaks to his friend, servant to his master; now asking some favour, now acknowledging our faults, and communicating to Him all that concerns us, our thoughts,

our fears, our projects, our desires, and in all things seeking His counsel.”

Prayer takes many forms from public prayer novenas with the spoken tongue to private meditations at the home altar, Moses wherever he went set up altars to God and through mental prayer we can have a constant altar at the forefront of our minds dedicated to God with our hearts as the sanctuary lamp. Mental prayer is the most common form of prayer and it is mainly communing with God mentally having a living conversation with him and most people sitting quietly in church before or after mass are praying to God mentally. The act itself brings together a collection of thoughts and is a good way to train yourself in imitation of the divine master and obtain a strong spirit as Saint Philip Neri instructs, “during mental prayer, it is well, at times, to imagine that many insults and injuries are being heaped upon us, that misfortunes have befallen us, and then strive to train our heart to bear and forgive these things patiently, in imitation of our Saviour. This is the way to acquire a strong spirit.” Jesus tells us when his disciples were asked to watch and pray with him but fell asleep that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41). Jesus stresses here the importance of prayer in focusing our minds and fixing our gazes upon the heavens in strong spirited mental prayer as Saint Ignatius teaches and offers spiritual instruction through exercises which he has published and is worth a read. Saint Teresa of Avila reveals that “how often I failed in my duty to God, because I was not leaning on the strong pillar of prayer.”

5 WORK, LIFE AND PRAYER

We all need to develop our prayer life into a strong and effective manner as taught by those who have attained full imitation of the Christ. Many of us in this modern age get distracted by the mod-cons of the world and caught up in instant gratification, they devote much time to work and they are deceiving themselves thinking that if they had more time they would devote it to God. Some prefer to become lost in their work and neglect their spiritual life and health. Working on the Sabbath (perhaps through necessity but this is not always the case) they do not realise that they are doing themselves much harm, or through ignorance are hiding from the benefit that comes from maintaining the spiritual aspect of their health. For as the idiom goes all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Saint Teresa of Avila instructs well on this, “Do not imagine that, if you had a great deal of time, you would spend more of it in prayer. Get rid of that idea; it is no hindrance, to prayer is to spend your time well”, she reminds us of our prayer formation when she continues instruction that “Jacob did not cease to be a Saint because he had to attend to his flocks”.

We must be careful not to become proud in our exterior composition that we become like the hypocrites among men who do their prayers on the street corners for all to see (Matthew 6:5). And we must remember that prayer lifts our souls up before the almighty just as Jesus’ full soul and divinity was raised to the Father. Saint Maria Magdalena de Pazzi instructs that “prayer ought to be humble, fervent, resigned, persevering, and accompanied with great reverence.

One should consider that he stands in the presence of a God, and speaks with a Lord before whom the angels tremble from awe and fear”.

Saint Paul writes that we must pray without ceasing and once we have perfected our interior and exterior dispositions we will therefore be in essence a prayer, one that speaks to the glory of God and that has asked and has been given the graces which maintained through prayer and knowing how and when to do so allows us to walk with the Christ and in his ways. We must strive through prayer to bring Jesus amongst the nations and the good news of salvation. As Saint Teresa of Avila states “let him never cease from prayer who has once begun it, be his life ever so wicked; for prayer is the way to amend it, and without prayer such amendment will be much more difficult.” And Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini instructs “we must pray without tiring, for the salvation of mankind does not depend upon material success . . . but on Jesus alone.”

In public prayer we pray for both the need of ourselves and those of others, but during our prayer we need to learn to do so for others too and for the sake of those who are less fortunate bringing the love of God and the good news to the poor. Our disposition as Christians should direct those to Jesus and how they can obtain the promises of the divine master. "The prayer most pleasing to God," says Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich is “made for others and particularly for the poor souls. Pray for them, if you want your prayers to bring high interest."

Jesus said you shall not tempt the Lord your God. We should never act as though God owes us something when he has given us the greatest gift in love, that of his son to teach us in his ways. Saint Teresa of Avila says that “anyone who has the habit of speaking before God's majesty as if he were speaking to a slave, careless about how he is speaking, and saying whatever comes into his head and whatever he's learned from saying prayers at other times, in my opinion is not praying. Please, God, may no Christian pray in this way.” And this is most definitely something to be avoided, God came to serve but not in the manner that he is subject to our will but us to his will, he came with humility and fidelity to bring us to the father so that we may know him more finally as the Christ knows the Father in final communion.

We should strive for the virtues of Jesus; the seven virtues taught by

the church and prayer (if done correctly) should bring us closer to achieving them, as Saint Teresa of Avila writes “I would never want any prayer that would not make the virtues grow within me.”

We have talked of public and mental prayer, Saint Teresa of Avila instructs that we must mentally reflect on the virtues of the prayer and what we will do with such if granted, before asking of God verbally, “vocal prayer . . . must be accompanied by reflection. A prayer in which a person is not aware of Whom he is speaking to, what he is asking, who it is who is asking and of Whom, I don't call prayer-----however much the lips may move.”

6 SICKNESS AND PRAYER

And what if we are too ill to pray, or even mentally reflect, or unable to verbally commune with God. Saint Teresa of Avila tells us that even illness can be offered up as prayer, “one must not think that a person who is suffering is not praying. He is offering up his sufferings to God, and many a time he is praying much more truly than one who goes away by himself and meditates and, if he has squeezed out a few tears, thinks that is prayer.”

Of course the Our Father given by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and Matthew for our instruction is always the most important prayer we must memorise or at least carry with us in written form. Saint Thomas Aquinas said it is the “most perfect prayer” and Tertullian states it contains the “summary if the whole Gospel.” Saint Teresa of Avila tell us when either said at mass from the heart, or in recitation of the rosary contritely “much more is accomplished by a single word of the Our Father said, now and then, from our heart, than by the whole prayer repeated many times in haste and without attention.”

Saint Faustina the saint behind the divine mercy, had to learn in formation on the path to sainthood as Jesus chose when and how to reveal the secrets to obtaining his mercy and being like him in timed apparitions. She shares with us in her diary entry that we must pray fully and not hold back from God as he searches us and knows us. She had a series of apparitions of Jesus and writes what the divine master shared with her in the following dialogue: “my daughter...why do you not tell me about everything that concerns you, even the smallest details? Tell Me about everything, and know that this will

give Me great joy. I answered, But You know about everything, Lord." And Jesus replied to me, "Yes I do know; but you should not excuse yourself with the fact that I know, but with childlike simplicity talk to Me about everything, for my ears and heart are inclined towards you, and your words are dear to Me (2; 921). It is from these words that we find that Jesus does indeed commune with us in prayer and Saint John Vianney explains that "prayer is the inner bath of love into which the soul plunges itself." May we fully plunge ourselves into prayer and therefore unite fully with Christ. As further extracts from her diary reveal, Jesus says that he will fully plunge Saint Faustina into his divine mercy, offering a fruitful witness to the rewards of a strong prayer life.

Jesus gives Saint Faustina instruction on how to achieve a balanced prayer life and what to include: "I remind you, My daughter, that as often as you hear the clock strike the third hour, immerse yourself completely in My mercy, adoring and glorifying it; invoke its omnipotence for the whole world, and particularly for poor sinners; for at that moment mercy was opened wide for every soul. In this hour you can obtain everything for yourself and for others for the asking; it was the hour of grace for the whole world - mercy triumphed over justice. My daughter, try your best to make the Stations of the Cross in this hour, provided that your duties permit it; and if you are not able to make the Stations of the Cross, then at least step into the chapel for a moment and adore, in the Blessed Sacrament, My Heart, which is full of mercy; and should you be unable to step into the chapel, immerse yourself in prayer there where you happen to be, if only for a very brief instant. I claim veneration for My mercy from every creature, but above all from you, since it is to you that I have given the most profound understanding of this mystery. (1572)

Blessed Luigi Orione instructs how to pray in both physical and mental posture by clasp hands together and kneeling before the Lord who lifts us up in prayer and eyes closed in meditation. We have looked over this topic earlier as mental prayer, and he shares with us further how to pray without ceasing in such a state that we shall be praying mentally fixed during running as if kneeling in God's presence, "without Prayer nothing good is done. God's works are done with our hands joined, and on our knees. Even when we run, we must remain spiritually kneeling before Him." St. Cyprian of

Carthage said “consider that we stand in the sight of God.”

With our gaze fixed upon Jesus and asking for the goodness that comes from his divine mercy for mankind. That man cannot save itself without Jesus, as St Frances Xavier Cabrini teaches “we must pray without tiring, for the salvation of mankind does not depend on material success; nor on sciences that cloud the intellect. Neither does it depend on arms and human industries, but on Jesus alone.”

7 SPIRITUAL COMMUNION

Saint Vincent de Paul reminds us that man does not live by bread alone but the word of God and the good works that come from the well-spring of love that is God and inspired works by the Holy Spirit sent by God from the great silence, by making time to “read some chapter of a devout book....It is very easy and most necessary, for just as you speak to God when at prayer, God speaks to you when you read.”

Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque instructs us that if we are not making progress in prayer despite making time in private to read or meditate, go to mass and receive communion “then you need only offer God the prayers which the Saviour has poured out for us in the sacrament of the altar. Offer God His fervent love in reparation for your sluggishness.”

If you do this and you still feel no answer from God on a particular stress then as Saint Alphonsus Liguori instructs “It often happens that we pray God to deliver us from some dangerous temptation, and yet God does not hear us but permits the temptation to continue troubling us. In such a case, let us understand that God permits even this for our greater good. When a soul in temptation recommends itself to God, and by His aid resists, O how it then advances in perfection.”

There may be a deeper concentrated force that is stopping your interpretations or clouding your judgment and you can further attain mental prayer by fasting and good will acts making the sign of the cross for each crumb of goodness as “[The devil] dreads fasting,

prayer, humility, and good works: He is not able even to stop my mouth who speak against him. The illusions of the devil soon vanish, especially if a man arms himself with the Sign of the Cross. The devils tremble at the Sign of the Cross of our Lord, by which He triumphed over and disarmed them.”

Spiritual communion has always since the early days of the church been present and is a combination of the various prayer techniques and offerings, when one does spiritual communion they unite themselves in mental prayer with the suffering of Our Lord and therefore the masses said throughout the world at any given time. As Saint Faustina writes in her diary “when I immersed myself in prayer and united myself with all the Masses that were being celebrated all over the world at that time, I implored God, for the sake of all these Holy Masses, to have mercy on the world and especially on poor sinners who were dying at that moment. At the same instant, I received an interior answer from God that a thousand souls had received grace through the prayerful mediation I had offered to God. We do not know the number of souls that is ours to save through our prayers and sacrifices; therefore, let us always pray for sinners.” (1783)

It is always a good idea to pray before and after meals, the divine office when and where possible and prayer before and after confession, mass and so on. The faithful, who pray in the spirit of fire and understanding, bring much to the table of the Lord, the salvation of souls. As Saint Charles Borromeo instructs us “we must meditate before, during and after everything we do. The prophet says: ‘I will pray, and then I will understand.’ This is the way we can easily overcome the countless difficulties we have to face day after day, which, after all, are part of our work. In meditation we find the strength to bring Christ to birth in ourselves and in others.”

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton instructs that after we have attained the key to praying without ceasing using mental or vocal prayer, we with contrite heart must “pray without ceasing, in every occurrence and employment of our lives - that prayer which is rather a habit of lifting up the heart to God as in a constant communication with Him.”

We need not be long and arduous in our conversations with God in prayer as Saint Benedict instructs us “prayer ought to be short and pure, unless it be prolonged by the inspiration of Divine grace.”

However, the shortness of your prayers does not mean it will not

have the same effect as longer ones, as Saint Peter Julian Eymard tells us "in order to succeed in it (prayer), it should be done when we first awaken, when our whole being is calm and recollected. We need to make our meditation before anything else."

8 PERSONAL PRAYER

We have covered mental prayer, perfecting and tweaking practice and implementation of prayer but first and foremost as it is from the heart it must be personal and therefore speak to us as well as God. This is what Saint Peter Julian Eymard instructs us that "as far as possible, you should pray in quiet and silent devotion. Try to have a favourite topic of prayer, such as a devotion to the passion of Jesus, the Blessed Sacrament, awareness of the divine presence; go directly to Jesus without too much fuss." Saint Eymard tells us to "have confidence in prayer. It is the unfailing power which God has given us. By means of it you will obtain the salvation of the dear souls whom God has given you and all your loved ones. Ask and you shall receive, Our Lord said. Be yourself with the good Lord."

From prayer we learn that as Saint Thomas Aquinas instructs from *summa theologica* "love is to will the good of another" (*primae secundae patris*, 26, 4) and by perfecting our various methods and ability to willingly and habitually pray for others we will learn to love one another just as the Saviour instructed us and as he loved us by the imitation of his essence by studying Christology with deep mental meditation and prayerful interpretation.

As Jesus always went to pray behind the mountains so we too should "make [our] way to the lowest place and sit there" (Luke 14:10) praying with humility, not on street corners for all to see like the hypocrites but to go to our private place, open our hearts and seek no reward but to know our names are written in heaven and then be lifted upwards like incense.

We do not want to be on our own in heaven, nor shall we be as God brings us all together in heaven with his elect. Therefore we should as our duty either subtle or direct gives the good news to all as “the believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part One “the Profession of Faith”, Chapter Three, Article 2, 166)

By offering to pray for others in them shall a longing for truth be kindled and as the disciples had seen Christ pray and asked him to teach them hopefully the fruits of our actions shall translate into conversions of heart. As we receive instruction “on your feet! Travel the length and breadth of the country, for I mean to give it to you.” (Genesis 13:17) and in the formation of exterior prayer, we shall act as though we have obtained such. (Mark 11:24)

Once we have obtained conversions and the tools we use to spread the faith (zeal for Christ, rosaries, etcetera) we shall look after as possessions and property of the monastery. (St Benedict, the rule of Saint Benedict, chapter 31) And we shall be careful not to cast our pearls onto swine with a need to be aware of our surroundings and the importance of our religious articles in our devotions and prayers. (Matthew 7:6) Do not give to those who do not ask of you with special reverence for them. Speak of its value when the occasion arises, when getting up, working, etcetera (Deuteronomy 6:7) as Saint Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans that faith comes from what is heard (Deuteronomy 10:17).

If others hear us talking of the wonders of God in their mother tongue then the Holy Spirit, will have to give you new powers of expression! (Acts 2:8) That is, develop your prayer life and bring you closer to God and others through your acts of good will. And as such Christ and his Spirit acts in the hearts of the faithful as Christ communicates his spirit and the grace of God through the sacraments to all members of the Church, who thus bear the fruits of the new life of the spirit which is the master of prayer (Compendium Catechism of the Catholic Church, Pope Benedict XVI, P.57, 146). It is in this same spirit that the Bishops exercise their ministry of sanctification by prayer alongside their holy orders dispensing the grace of Christ by their ministry of the word, the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, their examples and good works. (Compendium Catechism of the Catholic Church, 186)

Through prayer we gain the virtue of obedience and it is in obedience

we turn to prayer that which is another fruit from the spirit of understanding gained through its ministry. And it was in obedience that Saint Teresa of Avila reveals how, why and when she wrote her book 'interior castle'.

9 MATURING WITH FAITH

We must be prayerful and asking much of our father in heaven like little children for if you are not - you will not enter heaven - for we must have child-like faith (Mark 10:15, Luke 18:17) when receiving formation in obedience but then put away childish things (1 Corinthians 13:11) and adorn the full armour of God upon mastering the prayer life from the Master Himself (Jesus) so that we can then enter into prayerful spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-18). Our hearts must be true and strong for where we store our treasures that is where our heart is (that is, Jesus in your heart with blind child-like faith you shall see His face with eyes of faith in heaven). An example of this would be Saint Augustine who spent his early years between conflicting faiths and world views, in a confusing world of paganism and Christianity. His book *Confessions* written in his forties tell of how he turned away from his childish ideas and licentious life to become instead a knight in the good fight, a staunch figure in Christianity and one of its most influential thinkers. As Saint Augustine writes, "You grant us many gifts when we pray for them," he talks of Ecclesiastics 23:6 enlightened by the spirit and adorned with the full armour of God, "Here speaks a true soldier of the heavenly army, not mere dust like the rest of us! But remember, O Lord, that we are dust. Remember that you made man from dust, and that he was lost and found again. My heart goes out to Paul for the words that he wrote by your inspiration: Nothing is beyond my powers, thanks to the strength God gives me. But he too was dust and could not do all things by his own power. Give me strength, O

Lord, so that I may do all things. Give me the grace to do as you command, and command me to do what you will!" (Confessions, Saint Augustine, p.236) this is attained through prayer, and God willing we will do as God asks so that through divine providence prayers will go answered and renewed in pain and suffering, penance and other acts of contrition, and the divine office, we too may be true prayer warriors of Christ called upon to enact his will and make things happen. As Saint Teresa of Avila says more tears are shed through answered prayers than unanswered ones. As faith allows us to see that as Saint Faustina writes in her diary what we receive in return far outweighs our gift (Luke 6:37) and we shall soon see that "every single grace comes to the soul through prayer" (146).

Books can be read as *Lectio Divina*, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis, *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence or *The Cloud of Unknowing* by an unknown English medieval writer or *Prayer* by Urs von Balthasar, a 20 century Jesuit and *Revelations of Divine Love* by Julian of Norwich. Be sure to choose carefully as there are many excellent writers on prayer and the spiritual life but you may not be ready for them yet as the disciples had no books but the direct word of God and we must be in the right spirit to interpret these books written by saints who have attained direct union with God.

One of the most important and catalytic events in the formation of the disciples was the petition to Jesus "teach us to pray," the desire to come to know the Father through his son Jesus. Asked in the name of the Father, through the Son and with the fire of the Holy Spirit that moved within the disciple's hearts and demonstrated with the words "You are the Christ" that is the living God the essence of prayer itself made known to Peter by the Spirit who moves by the Father. The disciples wished to unite themselves fully with the soul and divinity of God through a direct communion of prayer as Saint Faustina writes "I understood how much God loves us, how simple He is, though incomprehensible, and how easy it is to commune with Him, despite His great majesty. With no one do I feel as free and as much at ease as with Him" (603).

Evident from the gospels Jesus was a man of prayer and would often do so with an open heart, willing to share knowledge of prayer with others as a testimony to its importance in our daily lives. Such as that time on Holy Thursday in the Garden of Gethsemane when

his prayer was so intense that sweat poured down his face like drops of blood. St John in his wonderful chapter seventeen lets us hear Our Lord's high priestly prayer (as it is called) when he prayed for his apostles. Earlier on it was as a result of seeing their Master at prayer that the apostles asked him to teach them to pray and so he taught them the Our Father.

A great teacher of prayer the Benedictine monk Dom John Chapman, instructs us to "pray as you best can pray and not as you can't" so therefore we must not be disheartened from prayer when the soul is dry and weary through neglect but rather pray the Our Father with hope.

The disciples still forming in their vocation to be the Imitation of the Christ that is Holy required in their hearts the fire of the Holy Spirit that compels this desire of union with the Creator from which in the words of Saint Augustine we remain restless until attained.

10 DO NOT BE AFRAID

Therefore how do we of little faith progress in the furthestmost of faith in our pursuit of holiness and to imitate the One and the first step on this path is to understand the attainable but mostly repressed pursuit to find truth which is engrained in the conscious of us all. Some lost in this journey for truth find themselves locked in a downward spiral of inner despair; not recognising that in fact the Kingdom of God is within them and their hearts are tabernacles of the prince of peace who first they must open their hearts to and embrace the Spirit of truth.

Blessed John Paul II said not to abandon ourselves to despair as we are the Easter people and hallelujah is our song, these words remind us that the risen Christ is not only a fulfilment of prophecy but a reminder that in the same way Jesus was arisen on the third day, our prayer life is too one of constant renewal and sacrifice. That we should never be fully allowing ourselves to become fully abandoned in darkness but in the occasion of falling into despair we should always keep at the forefront of our mental prayer that Jesus had conquered the inner depths of despair and awoken a sense of joyous reawakening in his disciples so we too through prayer conquer the inner eschews of darkness to find light. Saint John of the Cross who in the Dark Night of the Soul shares the joy and heights of finding God from the deep dark depths in the night of the soul and joining in perfect union after a time of spiritual dryness. Many people suffer this and their longing is actually a prayer in its own right, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta had a spiritual dryness that lasted for more

than a decade but she laboured on with love and made it through stronger.

Pope Benedict XVI has inaugurated a year of faith and calls on us to look to Jesus and fix our gaze on him who perfects our faith. To do this we must open our hearts to God, as Blessed John Paul II says we must open wide the doors to Christ.

There is the essence of prayer – to open our hearts, to say yes to God as the hand maiden of the Lord (Mary) did. When she reflected on the words of the angel Gabriel believed and said yes to the will of God; in the way that her womb was filled with the only begotten Son of God by the Holy Spirit so will our hearts be filled with a fire of love in the quest for God from which prayer enkindles. The troubled mind of Joseph showed us that God has faith in us and speaks to us in our troubled hearts, sending his angels to comfort us and bring us back to the familiarity of the truth from in which we fear not.

Prayer is one of the most basic activities of all Christians not just Catholics, and yet it is also one of the least understood. While Christians should pray daily many find that they do not know what to pray for. Once we understand that prayer is not simply asking God for something but communing with God and with his saints, prayer can become as natural as talking to our family and friends. With divine providence while respecting our freedom God asks us to co-operate with him and gives us the ability to do so through actions, prayers and sufferings, thus awakening in us the desire to “will and to work for his good pleasure”. (Philippians 2:13)

I have mentioned saints a lot in this publication. The saints have achieved the imitation of Christ and can aid us through their own experiences interceding for us to God. This is something that must not be taken lightly since God in his wisdom and power sent his only begotten son to dwell among us and show us how it is possible to attain perfection and true communion with God in prayer which the saints have achieved and demonstrated through miraculous happenings on earth through prayers of the faithful to the saint(s). Christ is still present in our hearts and feeding our souls at the mass with two tables; one of the liturgies of the word where we hear the words of the Lord and the one of the last supper where the priest in the place of Christ feeds us with his body and blood through transubstantiation.

While all Christians pray, only Catholics and Eastern Orthodox pray

to the saints who have obtained true imitation of Christ and as such through their intercession in heaven from prayers of the faithful have obtained the great mercy and answered prayers with a great number miracles (required as part of the process to sainthood). This sometimes leads to great confusion among other Christians, who believe that prayer should be reserved for God alone. But if we understand what prayer truly is and we believe in life after death then prayer to the saints makes perfect sense. In the same spirit of understanding silent prayer allows us to commune with God as Saint Faustina tells us her spirit communed much with God in the great silence, “I spoke much with the Lord, without uttering a single word” (154, 411).

She continues to explain the great language of God to which hearts yearn and spirits talk, “Silence is a sword in the spiritual struggle... capable of attaining the closest union with God. It lives always under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God works in a silent soul without hindrance” (477, 552.) However, Saint Faustina reminds us of how important a balanced and perfected prayer life is important as in her diary she writes “keeping silent when one ought to speak is an imperfection and sometimes even a sin” (553).

The most important part of prayer is the meditation upon Jesus and his sacrifice upon the cross from where all salvation, promises and graces can be obtained. Marian devotion does not detract from Christ and indeed she brings all those who come to her to the Son. As Saint Faustina writes in her diary “the Mother of God told me to do what she had done, that, even when joyful, I should always keep my eyes fixed on the cross.”(561)

It is from the cross that the church was born and from whom Jesus feeds his lambs through the primacy of Saint Peter which is the only true church mandated by God and instituted by Christ himself.

It is from the event of Pentecost that the true spirit of understanding is obtained and it is at this event where the disciples are baptised with fire and power.

Once we have perfected our prayer life we shall jealously guard it with attendance at Holy Mass and maintenance of our personalised prayer routine as Saint Faustina wrote in her diary “I will safeguard my interior and exterior silence so that Jesus can rest in my heart” (504). As the prayer life is not one which is obtained overnight but one of careful and meticulous spiritual development requiring much

guidance as Saint Teresa of Avila instructs the faithful in her book *The Interior Castle*. In this book she talks of how to obtain and keep a strong prayer life with the various rooms being the levels to which our prayer development undergoes and the soul so ardently desires to attain.

As Pope Benedict writes in his own quest to find the face of Christ, this is in its own right a prayer, “and that is what redemption means; this stepping beyond the limits of human nature, which had been there as a possibility and an exception in man, God’s image and likeness, since the moment of creation” (Pope Benedict XVI, “Jesus of Nazareth”, p.8)

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Terry Lynch graduated from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth in 2008 with honours as a bachelor of social science and economics from the department of international politics. Studying the course international politics and military history, Terry covered a variety of themes; On War from Carl Von Clausewitz, Saint Thomas Aquinas' just war theology, twenty-first century warfare and others.